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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL EXPERIENCE  
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The Relationship Between Organizational Experience  
and Perceived Leader Behavior

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## Experience and Leader Behavior

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### Abstract

This study examined the relationship between organizational experience and perceived leader behavior in a sample of U.S. Navy enlisted personnel. Two bodies of literature (traditional organizational and cognitive processes) were reviewed which resulted in alternative viewpoints regarding the number of dimensions necessary to describe leader behavior in high or low experience groups. Principal components analyses of measures of perceived leader behavior conducted on high ( $n = 231$ ) and low ( $n = 255$ ) tenure groups indicated support for the cognitive processes perspective in that a greater number of meaningful leadership dimensions were found for more experienced workers. Comparison of relationships between matched perceived leader dimensions and measures of the workgroup environment for both groups established the predictive and discriminant validity of the derived leader components. Results are discussed in terms of the need for determining the representativeness of various leader behaviors in different work environment settings.

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The Relationship Between Organizational Experience  
and Perceived Leader Behavior

The accumulation of research evidence over the last several years demonstrates the interest in relationships between different aspects of organizational or workgroup functioning and perceived leader behaviors (cf. Stogdill, 1974; Vroom, 1976). Studies have focused on such varying issues as relationships between quality of military life and perceived leader attributes (Bleda, Gitter, & D'Agostino, 1977), exploring potential situational moderators of leader ability (O'Reilly & Roberts, 1978; Schriesheim & Murphy, 1976), and determining more specific influences of perceived leader behavior in specialized work environments (Butler, Jones, & La Rocco, 1978; Butler & Jones, Note 1). One concern in these studies has been to increase levels of understanding regarding relations between various dimensions of perceived leader behavior and work-related criteria. Schriesheim and Murphy (1976), for example, reported that leader consideration enhanced subordinate satisfaction and performance in relatively relaxed, nonstressful work environments, while formalized leader structure was more conducive to effective performance under high stress conditions. Butler (Butler et al., 1978; Butler & Jones, Note 1), however, indicated that a combination of structure and consideration behaviors were desirable under conditions of high job hazard (which might also be perceived as stress-producing).

Although considerable effort has been devoted to determining generalized dimensions of perceived leader behavior (cf. Bowers & Seashore, 1966;

Fleishman, Harris, & Burt, 1955; Fleishman & Peters, 1962; House, 1971), questions still exist concerning the salience of particular leader dimensions under differing organizational or situational conditions. House (1971), for example, suggested that more experienced workers have greater role clarity and thus require less structure and more consideration from their leaders. Less experienced workers, however, typically perceive less role clarity, more role conflict, and report correspondingly greater needs for both structure and consideration from the leader. Thus, the role of the leader is likely to be perceived differently according to the worker's level of experience or position within the organization.

To the extent that level of work experience actually moderates perceptions of leader behavior, one might also expect that the number of dimensions necessary to describe perceived leader characteristics may vary. The traditional perspective outlined by House (1971), then, might be interpreted to suggest that low tenure workers would perceive a greater number of leader characteristics because of the implication that less experienced workers place greater demands on the leader to fill a greater number of personal and job-related roles, especially regarding the acquisition of relevant work skills. Thus, low tenure individuals may have more varied interactions with the leader as a function of such demands, enabling them to distinguish more leader dimensions than might be assumed by their length of time on the job.

Alternatively, a growing body of literature on cognitive processes has indicated that increased levels of familiarity or experience in a

particular setting enable the individual to make more discrete and finely differentiated statements regarding complex relationships within the environment (cf. Mahoney, 1977; Solomon, 1977). This cognitively oriented perspective suggests that high tenure individuals would have greater ability to discriminate a larger number of perceived leader dimensions than would their low tenure counterparts, due primarily to the cumulative effects of organizational and job-related experiences. The present study employed factor analytic techniques to explore the above alternative perspectives in terms of the relationship between organizational experience and the number of dimensions underlying perceived leader behavior. In addition, the dimensions produced for each tenure group were matched and compared regarding their relationship to several work-related outcome measures.

#### Method

##### Subjects and Procedure

Measures of organizational experience (months on active duty), perceived leader behavior, and the workgroup environment were obtained from 486 male, enlisted personnel serving aboard three U.S. Navy amphibious assault ships deployed in the Western Pacific. The average age of the sample was 22.6 years, while the average educational level and length of service was 11.9 years and 46.6 months, respectively. Paygrade ranged from E-1, the lowest enlisted category, to E-9, the highest enlisted category ( $M = E-3$ ). Questionnaires were administered to all crew members of each ship near the end of an 8-month deployment period. Participation was voluntary; approximately 75% of all crew members responded to the questionnaire.

Measures

Perceived leader behavior. The perceived leadership measures consisted of 33 items (presented in 5-point Likert type format) designed to assess different aspects of a leader's behavior and were selected as representative of similar measures described in a large body of previous research. Specific leader-related behaviors included support, interaction facilitation, goal emphasis, and work facilitation (Bowers & Seashore, 1966; Campbell, Dunnette, Lawler, & Weick, 1970; Halpin, 1966; House & Kerr, 1973; Likert, 1961; Litwin & Stringer, 1968; Taylor, 1971) as well as items to measure the leader's ability to plan and coordinate activities and influence superiors (House & Kerr, 1973). Also included were items reflecting varying degrees of confidence and trust between supervisors and subordinates (Flacks, 1969; Jones, James, & Bruni, 1975; Sells, 1968; Wood, 1974).

Workgroup environment. Measures of the workgroup environment included cooperation, friendliness, pride, and effectiveness (Blau, 1954; Farris, 1971; Hackman & Lawler, 1971; Hall, 1971; Steiner, 1972). More specifically, these measures consisted of 14 items grouped into four a priori composites: (a) Workgroup Cooperation (an atmosphere in which there is cooperative effort among individuals to carry out difficult tasks; 4 items,  $\alpha = .76$ ), (b) Workgroup Friendliness (the extent to which there is communication, trust, and friendly relations among members of a workgroup; 3 items,  $\alpha = .73$ ), (c) Workgroup Pride (the extent to which members take pride in their group; 4 items,  $\alpha = .66$ ), and (d) Workgroup Effectiveness (the extent to which the group is seen as able to produce work of higher quality and quantity



than other groups in the organization; 3 items;  $\alpha = .61$ ). All workgroup measures were scored by summing responses to constituent items (presented in 5-point Likert type format) so that higher scores reflected more favorable workgroup conditions (cf., Jones & James, Note 2).

### Analyses

To explore the effects of organizational experience on perceptions of leader behavior, individuals were classified (based on a median split) into high tenure ( $\geq 30$  months of active duty;  $n = 225$ ) or low tenure ( $< 30$  months of active duty;  $n = 231$ ) groups. Separate principal components analyses were conducted on the responses to the 33 perceived leadership items for each group. Based on the results of a scree test performed for each group (cf. Cattell, 1966; Gorsuch, 1974), the meaningful components produced in the respective analyses were rotated to varimax simple structure and matched using Tucker's coefficient of congruence (Tucker, 1951; Tucker, Koopman, & Linn, 1969). Finally, salient variable component scores (Gorsuch, 1974; Wackwitz & Horn, 1971) were calculated for each high or low tenure respondent by summing responses to the salient variables (i.e., variables with loadings  $\geq \pm .40$ ) on each component. Correlational techniques were used to relate these scores to the measures of workgroup environment described above.

## Results

### Components Analyses

High tenure group. The results of a principal components analysis conducted on the responses to the 33 perceived leader behavior items for

the high tenure group produced seven components with eigenvalues  $\geq 1.0$  (59.62% of the trace). Inspection of the initial (i.e., unrotated) factor matrix suggested a weak general factor (the first principal component), which accounted for 36.38% of the total variance among the original items. The results of a scree test (Cattell, 1966; Gorsuch, 1974), however, indicated a noticeable break after the fifth component. Hence, the first five components, accounting for 53.36% of the total item variance, were extracted and rotated to varimax simple structure. Following varimax rotation, the five components accounted for 20.17%, 8.46%, 5.64%, 10.18%, and 8.92% of the variance among the original items, respectively. Estimates of internal consistency reliability (i.e., coefficient alpha) for each rotated component, based on the salient variables were .94, .74, .49, .79, and .80, respectively.

Low tenure group. The principal components analysis of responses to the 33 perceived leader behavior items for the low tenure individuals also yielded seven components with eigenvalues  $\geq 1.0$ , accounting for 59.31% of the trace. Inspection of the unrotated factor matrix for this group also suggested a weak general factor which accounted for 35.37% of the total variance. For the low tenure group, however, the results of a scree test revealed a noticeable break between the fourth and fifth components. Therefore, only the first four components (accounting for 48.90% of the total variance) were extracted, and rotated to varimax simple structure. Following varimax rotation, the four components accounted for 11.31%, 18.81%, 10.60%, and 8.18% of the variance among the original items, respectively. Estimates

members' general trust of their officers and chief petty officers, success on the part of the leader in dealing with higher levels of command, and the supervisor's willingness to "go to bat" for subordinates. The third matched component suggested an active, participative leadership style, and was defined by items which referred to the leader's willingness to (a) hold group meetings and discuss work-related problems, (b) actively recognize and reward good performance, (c) encourage independent thought and action, and (d) attend to subordinate comments regarding work-related matters. The fourth matched component was dominated by items reflecting high structure and low trust, defined in terms of leaders who required formal, written statements of work progress, an emphasis on punishing errors and mistakes rather than rewarding successes and good performance, and generally described a predominantly "Theory X" approach to worker supervision. In summary, these four components were labelled as (a) Goal Emphasis/Structure for Training, (g) High Confidence and Trust, (c) Participative Leadership, and (d) High Structure/Low Trust.

One final point is noteworthy. The second component for the high tenure group did not match any of the four components retained in the low tenure group solution (coefficients of congruence ranged from .60 to .78). This component was defined by five items ( $\alpha = .74$ ) and referred to those aspects of leader behavior labelled Planning and Coordination. Items loading on this dimension conceptually dealt with efforts from the supervisor to help subordinates schedule work assignments as well as difficulties

in completing work assignments due to lack of time, material, or tools resulting from poor planning from the supervisor. As mentioned earlier, this component accounted for 8.46% of the total variance in the high tenure solution.

#### Correlational Analyses

To assess the concurrent validity of the four matched perceived leader dimensions, product-moment correlations were computed between the component scores calculated for each dimension and the measures of workgroup environment described earlier. These results are contained in Table 2, presented for both high and low tenure groups.

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Insert Table 2 about here.

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Inspection of the values reported in Table 2 revealed several interesting relationships. Generally speaking, all correlations were significant, of relatively high magnitude, and in the theoretically appropriate direction. For example, Goal Emphasis/Structure for Training, High Confidence and Trust, and Participative Leadership practices were all seen as positively associated with workgroup cooperation, friendliness, effectiveness, and pride. High Structure/Low Trust characteristics, on the other hand, were generally perceived as negatively associated with the same measures of the workgroup environment. Given the rather large amounts of variance associated with the majority of these zero-order values (i.e., average  $R^2 = .16$ ), such findings are noteworthy.

Of somewhat greater importance, however, were differences noted between tenure groups across several of the perceived leader domains. Overall, the relationship between those perceived leader dimensions which most closely resembled traditional "consideration-type" behaviors (i.e., Goal Emphasis/Structure for Training, High Confidence and Trust, and Participative Leadership) and the work environment measures was strongest for low tenure as opposed to high tenure workers. For example, among low tenure workers Goal Emphasis/Structure for Training, High Confidence and Trust, and Participative Leadership qualities were more strongly associated with workgroup cooperation than among high tenure workers ( $z = 2.16, p < .05$ ;  $z = 3.23, p < .001$ ; and  $z = 2.99, p = < .01$ , respectively). Similar between-group relationships also were found for workgroup friendliness and High Confidence and Trust ( $z = 2.25, p < .05$ ) as well as workgroup effectiveness and both Goal Emphasis/Structure for Training ( $z = 2.37, p < .01$ ) and High Confidence and Trust ( $z = 3.71, p < .001$ ). No between-tenure group differences were found for the High Structure/Low Trust dimension.

#### Discussion

The major goal of the current study was to investigate variations in the number of dimensions underlying perceived leader behavior, moderated by level of actual, work-related experience within the organization. Approached from either traditional or more cognitively oriented theoretical perspectives, a case was made to support the presence of varying numbers of perceived leader dimensions associated with high or low tenure groups. Although not overwhelming, the results of the principal components analyses

lend moderate support to the cognitive orientation. In this regard, not only was an additional component (i.e., Planning and Coordination) found to be useful in providing a more complete description of high tenure individuals' perceptions of leader behavior, but its content as well reflected a level of sophistication or discrimination that one would not expect among low tenure workers. In short, and as implied by the cognitively oriented perspective, low tenure individuals appeared to lack the conceptual ability, or opportunity, to perceive Planning and Coordination type behaviors as an integral part of overall leadership style.

A second goal of this study was to assess both the predictive and discriminant validity of the matched leadership dimensions for each tenure group derived from the two components analyses. In this regard, the results of the correlational analyses suggested several informative relationships. On the one hand, the four matched perceived leadership dimensions were found to be strongly related to each of the measures of the workgroup environment. Of greater interest, however, was the finding that for low tenure workers several of the leadership dimensions were significantly more highly related to workgroup functioning than was the case for their high tenure counterparts. Such findings gain in importance when one considers that the significant differences occurred for those dimensions that directly reflect not only consideration-type behaviors on the part of the leader, but as House (1971) observed, also included those behaviors most likely to facilitate the reduction of role conflict in the less experienced worker by ameliorating apparent needs for both role clarity as well as training and instruction.

Hill (1973) also reported findings which shed indirect light on the subordinate needs-leader behavior issue noted above. While not explicitly refuting a contingency theory perspective, Hill suggested that leaders may not substantially vary their choice of particular leadership behaviors in the face of changing situational or task demands, but that subordinates merely perceive such changes as occurring. Furthermore, such variations in perceived leader behavior should reflect differences in either personality composition, personal expectations, or the personal attribution theories of subordinates. At the workgroup level, then, differences in perceived leader behavior might be expected among subordinates, or groups of subordinates, who place greater importance or emphasis on a specific set of leader behaviors (e.g., intrapersonal communication, training, needs for guidance or structure, and so forth). In short, varying degrees of such emphasis on the part of subordinates directly influence expectations regarding what leader behaviors are appropriate in a given situation. Thus, the same behavioral act on the part of the leader may be judged differently by certain subgroups of subordinates, for example, high versus low tenure workers.

While the results of the present study tend to support Hill's (1973) observations, it might be argued by some that the magnitude of the reported findings could be attenuated somewhat by the influence of certain external variables, such as demographic characteristics of the sample. To determine the validity of such a criticism, each tenure group was examined regarding distributions of age and paygrade, and it was found that approximately equal proportions of individuals were represented in the appropriate cells

for each tenure group. It thus appears that potential restriction of range criticisms do not apply.

With regard to the current findings, however, of greater potential concern are criticisms based on the effects of occupational or job type differences. As has been shown in several earlier investigations (Butler et al., 1978; Schriesheim & Murphy, 1976), the moderating influence of certain situational or job characteristics (e.g., stress, hazard, etc.) are not only experienced by individual workers but are also related to variations in perceived leader attributes. Thus, indications to date underscore the need for additional investigations regarding the dimensional representativeness of various leader behaviors in different work environment settings.



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2. Jones, A. P., & James, L. R. Psychological and organizational climate: Dimensions and relationships (Report No. 77-12). San Diego: Naval Health Research Center, 1977.

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Table 1  
Rotated Component Structure Loadings of Leadership  
Items for Matched High and Low Tenure Dimensions

Leadership Items	Rotated Component Structure Loadings <sup>a</sup>							
	I		II		III		IV	
	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
1. How well does your supervisor recognize and reward good performance by his people?	.45				.43	.53	.45	.41
2. To what extent does your supervisor emphasize high standards of performance?	.57	.57						
3. To what extent does your supervisor encourage you and your co-workers to think and act for yourselves?		.42			.68	.48		
4. How often does your supervisor hold group meetings where he and the people who work for him really discuss things?					.65	.56		
5. Overall, how good a job do you feel is being done by your immediate supervisor?	-.52			.47				
6. How often is your supervisor willing to go to bat for his men?	-.53			.49				
7. The crew members generally trust their chief petty officers.			.45	.60				
8. My supervisor checks everything; individual judgment is not trusted.							.42	.70
9. In my workgroup, a crew member is almost certain to hear about mistakes, but seldom hears about his successes.						.49	.57	
10. To what extent does your supervisor set an example by working hard himself?	.54					.62		
11. To what extent does your supervisor offer new ideas for job-related problems?	.57					.60		
12. In general, how are decisions made in your work-group?					.54	.55		
13. Does the way your workgroup is organized help or hurt the efficient performance of the work?						-.64		
14. How successful is your immediate supervisor in dealing with higher levels of command?			.52	.57		-.43		
15. The crew members generally trust their officers.			.79	.56				
16. Verbal reports are never accepted; everything has to be in writing in my division.	.43						.75	.50

## Experience and Leader Behavior

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Rotated Component Structure Loadings<sup>a</sup>

Leadership Items	I		II		III		IV	
	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
17. To what extent is your supervisor willing to listen to your problems?	.59	.40				.55		
18. To what extent does your supervisor encourage people to give their best effort?	.75	.76						
19. To what extent does your supervisor provide the help you need to schedule your work ahead of time?	.54					.56		
20. To what extent does your supervisor encourage the people who work for him to work as a team?	.72	.52				.40		
21. How often are changes made after you begin a task because of poor planning or lack of coordination?						.43		
22. How successful is your supervisor in getting the best assignments for your workgroup?				.44				
23. My supervisor acts as though everyone must be watched or they will slack off.						.52	.50	.56
24. To what extent is your supervisor friendly and easy to approach?	.54					.51		
25. To what extent does your supervisor stress the importance of work goals?	.74	.59				.44		
26. To what extent does your supervisor show you how to improve your performance?	.72	.48				.57		
27. To what extent does your supervisor encourage the people who work for him to exchange ideas and opinions?	.57					.58		
28. How often does poor planning by your supervisor cause shortages in needed tools or materials?				.48				
29. How often is your supervisor able to get higher levels of command to recognize the success of your workgroup?				.56			-.44	
30. My supervisor treats his men with respect.	-.41			.48		-.44	-.46	
31. My supervisor is where he is because of his ability to work effectively.	-.57					-.48		
32. To what extent does your supervisor pay attention to what you say?	.46				.41	.53		
33. How would you describe the amount of responsibility assigned by your supervisor?		.49			.50			

<sup>a</sup>Only loadings  $\geq \pm .40$  are reported.

Table 2  
Correlations Between Matched Leadership Components for High and  
Low Tenure Groups and Measures of Workgroup Environment

Measures of Workgroup Environment	Goal Emphasis/ Structure for Training		Matched Leadership Components				High Structure/ Low Trust	
	High <sup>a</sup> Low <sup>b</sup>		High Confidence and Trust		Participative Leadership		High Low	
	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
Cooperation	.41	.56	.30	.54	.45	.64	-.44	-.41
Friendliness	.36	.47	.26	.44	.39	.51	-.39	-.32
Effectiveness	.25	.44	.05 <sup>c</sup>	.37	.28	.41	-.22	-.23
Pride	.34	.42	.32	.45	.40	.47	-.41	-.36

Note: Values joined by underscore are significantly different ( $p < .05$ ).

<sup>a</sup>  $n = 255$

<sup>b</sup>  $n = 231$

<sup>c</sup> Not significant; all other correlations are significant beyond  $p < .01$ .



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for the cognitive processes perspective, in that a greater number of meaningful leadership dimensions were found for more experienced workers. Comparison of relationships between matched perceived leader dimensions and measures of the workgroup environment for both groups established the predictive and discriminant validity of the derived leader components. Results are discussed in terms of the need for determining the representativeness of various leader behaviors in different work environment settings.

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